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**Mercury
removal
from water
is an issue**

by MARIAN
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LAKE COUNTY

LCDU Director Rick Martin addressed the issue of mercury entering the water supply and the expense of having to try to remove it during the water treatment process.

"We are not a major generator of mercury, obviously, we are a receiver of mercury into our systems," he said. "They come in through industrial and commercial sources."

About 10 years ago, LCDU had all mercury switches removed from its plants. A recycling program was also initiated to recycle fluorescent bulbs, batteries and other items which could affect the environment adversely.

A Utilities Department educational program was created to survey and educate businesses in the county about keeping mercury out of the water system. There was some concern dental practices might have been contributing, but surveys indicate county dentists are not using mercury in their practices.

EPA mandates are requiring plants which were previously permitted to exceed guidelines for mercury in the water to begin meeting them.

"That variance was granted because we provided substantial information that says it's an environmental impact," Martin said. "The mercury is coming from rain events, snow, it's in the air and we really don't have a lot of control over the environment and the atmosphere."

He said the EPA needed to look at the sources of mercury pollution, that it was unfair to place the burden of responsibility on water treatment facilities.

The county plants do manage to remove about 99 percent of the mercury from the water that comes in. However, the cost for complete removal would be expensive. Martin said he was told the EPA estimated the cost of removing one pound of mercury from wastewater to be about \$10 million.